

WYCOMBE Wanderers face by far their most difficult task of the season tomorrow (Saturday) when they take on Southern League Bedford Town in the first round of the F.A. Cup at Loakes Park (writes Stuart Earp).

After last season's historic run in the cup, when the Blues reached the third round for the first time in 90 years, it would be a miracle if they were to repeat that feat a season later. And there are several factors against Wycombe.

Firstly, they do not have as good a team as last term. The loss of two class forwards has inevitably taken its toll, although the team has done well to raise themselves into third position in the league; secondly, they have several injury worries and are certain to be without their regular left back Ray Eaton. Thirdly, they are facing a side that is full of experience in cup matches.

Wycombe manager Brian Lee is under no illusions about the tie. He told me this week: "Bedford will be the hardest Southern League side we have ever played.

They have many experienced players and are generally a good all round side, with no resemblance of weakness."

Brian watched Bedford at Wimbledon last week when they held the Southern League leaders to a 0-0 draw. Before that, assistant John Reedon saw the "Eagles" at Bath, where they lost 1-0. Lee was extremely impressed by them. By playing four midfield men, they swamped the middle of the pitch and hardly allowed Wimbledon a single chance. They got the result they came for — a draw.

NULLIFIED

There's not much doubt Bedford will be going all out for a similar result tomorrow at Loakes Park. Manager Jim Walker is hoping to keep the same team which nullified Wimbledon's considerable attack — although it should be stated that Keiron Somers, perhaps the best target man out-

side league football, was not playing.

Recent injuries have forced manager Walker to take a safety first outlook. Left sided midfielder Kevin Dove misses the tie with torn ligaments and Leo Markham, who used to play at nearby Marlow, has come into the side. Markham is operating in midfield and was singled out by Brian Lee as one of the main reasons why Wimbledon did not score on Saturday. "He was their best midfielder player and did really well in the air, both defending and at Bedford free kicks," he said.

Markham will play an important role for Bedford tomorrow but the whole team is confident that they can get the result they are searching for.

The Eagles seem to be strong in most departments. They have two highly experienced players in defence — Dave Skinn and Norman Coolley. These two played against Wanderers during those four memorable F.A. Cup

games at the same stage in 1966. The remaining Wycombe men are John Maskell and Tony Horseman.

In midfield, there is Markham and also Peter Hawkins, a Welsh under 23 international and a talented player. But while Bedford will concentrate on defence tomorrow, they still have two players of real skill upfront, who will be out to snap up any half chances given to them. They are Gary Sargent and Peter Phillips.

Sargent has built up quite a reputation for himself in recent years. Last season he scored 28 goals and was wanted by several Football League clubs. He stayed with Bedford and has already 21 this season, including seven goals in the four qualifying rounds of the Cup.

Phillips spent some time in professional football with Luton and Cambridge United and is regarded as one of the fastest forwards in the Southern League.

All in all then, Bedford present a really difficult hurdle for Wycombe to cross. And they have an impressive list of F.A. Cup victims in the past.

Bedford joined the Southern League 30 years ago and have distinguished themselves more by their F.A. Cup than their league performances.

Relegated from the Southern League Premier Division three times in the past nine years, on each occasion they have come straight back, twice winning the first division championship.

Last season they ran away with the title winning it with eight points to spare and reached the semi-finals of the F.A. Trophy after beating Northern Premier league champions Wigan on their home ground.

In the F.A. Cup they have pitted their skills against several first division sides in the past. Twenty-five years ago they held Arsenal to a draw at Highbury before losing the replay by a single goal. They also lost (0-3) to 1966 cup winners Everton in the third round.

In recent years they have put out Gillingham (twice), Brighton, Oxford United and Swindon. But perhaps their greatest performance was in 1964 when they knocked out Newcastle United, winning 2-1 at St. James Park. Skinn is the only survivor from that side.

BLUES TEAM

But what of the Wycombe team? John Maskell and John Delaney, who both missed Tuesday night's draw at Southall, should be back in the side but, as previously stated, Ray Eaton is out. That means Paul Birdseye will have to stay in the left back position and either Dave Alexander or Dave Bullock will play in the number two shirt. It will be a difficult choice for the manager. Bullock has strength and height while Alexander is more mobile.

The midfield and forward positions should be as normal with Geoff Anthony seemingly fit after playing the full 90 minutes on Tuesday, albeit with a heavily strapped thigh.

Anthony's fitness is important to Wycombe. Bedford showed at Wimbledon that by keeping tight on front runners, they restricted the number of chances. No one was able to get behind the defence. Anthony has the skill to beat players and get over telling crosses while Mick Holifield and Dylan Evans both have the speed to trouble Bedford's defence.

The outcome of this all-important game could depend on the form of the Wycombe strikers. Tony Horseman, as leading goalscorer, will find himself a marked man and so the others must take the initiative.

If Wanderers get the breaks they could surprise Bedford with their skill but, make no mistake about it, this is an extremely difficult test for Wycombe.

Dangerman Sargent



Dangerman Gary Sargent, Bedford's leading goalscorer, scores against Highgate during their FA Trophy run last season.

How they stand

ROTHMANS ISTHMIAN LEAGUE

DIVISION ONE (up to and inc. 18/11/75)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Enfield	20	14	3	3	49	19	45
Hendon	22	12	5	5	35	18	41
Wycombe	22	11	6	5	36	25	38
Dulwich	21	12	2	7	41	21	38
Iford	21	11	5	5	28	20	38
D'ham	20	11	4	5	45	31	37
Slough	22	9	7	6	34	25	34
Sutton	19	9	6	4	40	23	33
L'head	20	9	5	6	35	33	32
Tooting	17	9	4	4	28	18	31
Barking	17	9	3	5	27	24	30
Staines	18	7	5	6	21	15	28
Hayes	19	5	5	9	22	28	26
Bishop's	21	7	5	9	26	28	26
Hitchin	21	7	5	9	20	27	26
Kings	19	6	4	9	31	47	22
Southall	14	4	5	5	24	27	17
W'stow	18	4	3	11	20	33	15
Woking	22	4	3	15	25	41	15
Oxford	17	3	5	9	9	25	14
L'stone	20	1	5	13	14	37	8
Clapton	20	1	0	19	5	58	3

SOUTHERN LEAGUE PREMIER DIVISION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
W'bledon	13	10	1	2	24	11	21
N'eaton	12	7	5	0	15	6	19
M'stone	13	6	5	2	17	11	17
Grantham	14	6	4	4	15	12	16
Dunst.	12	7	1	4	22	13	15
Weymth	14	5	4	5	23	21	14
Atherst.	12	5	4	3	18	20	14
Chelms.	13	5	4	4	18	20	14
Bedford	14	4	5	5	14	20	13
Telford	14	6	1	7	17	18	13
Graves	11	3	6	2	8	7	12
Tonbdge.	11	4	4	3	13	14	12
Burton	13	5	2	6	14	18	12
Yeovil	11	4	3	4	17	13	11
Weald.	11	4	3	4	18	18	11
Kettig.	14	3	4	7	16	21	10
Bath	14	2	6	6	13	18	10
Margate	12	4	2	6	12	18	10
Dover	12	1	7	4	8	11	9
Stour.	12	3	3	6	11	18	9
Camb. C.	12	2	4	6	15	28	8
Hilling.	12	3	1	8	14	19	7